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## Therapeutic Horror? Olga Druce, *House of Mystery* and the Controversy over Children's Radio Thrillers.

- Frank Krutnik -

### Abstract

From the 1930s to the 1950s, parents, educators, psychologists and others hotly debated the impact of US radio's sensational genre programming on young listeners. While many condemned radio thrillers and chillers for subjecting children to excessive emotional arousal, or for encouraging juvenile delinquency, more progressive authorities argued for their cathartic potential. Drawing on a wide range of materials from contemporary newspapers, magazines, trade journals and radio shows, this article examines the post-World War 2 revival of this controversy over sensational programming. It explores the efforts of child education experts such as Josette Frank to contest the emotive denunciation of children's radio, and children's culture more broadly, as well as their attempt to develop child-centered programming that combined thrills with socially-enlightened content. The popular and award-winning *House of Mystery* (1945-49) was a key exemplification of this strategy. Building on the success Frank and producer Robert Maxwell enjoyed with the acclaimed juvenile serial *The Adventures of Superman* (1940-51), Maxwell's *House of Mystery* was an audacious program that tailored horror scenarios to young listeners. Under the stewardship of visionary writer-director Olga Druce, this popular and award-winning program sought a strategic compromise between the pleasures and the perils of audio horror. While delivering the stimulation children desired from genre fare, *House of Mystery* served as a therapeutic intervention that countered both the morbid sensations peddled by crime and horror dramas and the predictable condemnation of youth programming.

**Keywords:** US radio, radio horror, children's media, postwar US culture, Josette Frank, Superman, seriality.

## Therapeutic Horror? Olga Druce, *House of Mystery* and the Controversy over Children's Radio Thrillers.

In February 1945 Mr. Duboff, a concerned parent, accused radio producer Robert Maxwell of making his new children's program, *House of Mystery* (1945-49), "too much like INNER SANCTUM".<sup>1</sup> As radio historian John Dunning observed, the popular and long-running *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (1941-52) delivered "some of the most farfetched, unbelievable, and downright impossible murder tales ever devised", its "strange combination of horror and humor... played strictly for chills" (Dunning 346). Mindful of the recent furor over violent and sensational radio dramas, as well as a long-running controversy over children's programming, Maxwell took pains in his reply to Duboff to distinguish *House of Mystery* from the series Richard J. Hand would later identify as the "paradigm of horror radio" (Hand 118):

The main purpose of HOUSE OF MYSTERY is to explain and expose, to assure youngsters that the occult, the supernatural and the spiritualistic do *not* exist; to allay fears of the darkness and to show them that wherever supernatural manifestations are said to exist, they can be traced to natural phenomenon [*sic*] or man-made effects... [I]n HOUSE OF MYSTERY we have the first children's entertainment vehicle possessed of therapeutic value (Quattro, "Josette Frank... Part 3").

As a horror program designed specifically for the young, *House of Mystery* was a highly unusual proposition. Confronting the common presumption that children's audio drama should steer clear of morbid stimulation, it aimed to engage listeners with thrills and chills while cleansing them of dark compulsions. The program derived from a long-running battle by child education activists to challenge restrictive formulations of children's culture. It was especially indebted, I will suggest, to the views of Josette Frank, a pioneering champion of child-centered culture who collaborated with Robert Maxwell on several youth-oriented radio dramas. Olga Druce - the program's writer, producer and ambassador, and an acolyte of Frank's - further enhanced its progressive mission, arguing that *House of Mystery* illustrated how "radio's mystery-type shows could serve a positive educational function" ("Mystery Shows Can Be Worthy").<sup>2</sup>

Drawing on an extensive array of primary materials - including contemporary newspapers, magazines, trade journals, and radio shows - this article excavates a neglected yet fascinating era of US media history. Besides shedding light on a remarkable yet unjustly forgotten drama series, it seeks to illuminate the broader conflicts and controversies inspired by children's relationship to radio, as well as the campaign to establish a progressive and child-oriented vision of youth programming. *House of Mystery* sought to heal the excesses of radio sensation by brokering a strategic compromise between the pleasures and the perils of audio horror. At the same time, it operated as a self-conscious intervention into the bitter, often hysterical disputes that radio's influence on the young had triggered since the early 1930s. Rather than sidestepping the generic sensations that parents and educators repeatedly

condemned, *House of Mystery* embraced them - but with a deconstructive and therapeutic sense of purpose.

## **The Radio Boogeyman**

The complaint from Mr. Duboff, fielded so adroitly by Robert Maxwell, was part of a long tradition of protest against radio's capacity to thrill and enthrall young listeners. In 1933, with its national and commercial entertainment service only recently stabilized, a controversy rocked the broadcasting industry that would haunt it, on and off, for two decades. The Fox Meadow PTA, in New York's wealthy suburb of Scarsdale, launched a headline-grabbing campaign against the "nerve-wracking stories served to children just before bedtime over the air" ("Mothers Protest 'Bogyman'").<sup>3</sup> As the *New York Times* reported, "parents have seen youngsters break down and weep in the middle of a radio story. Sometimes a youngster will scream in fright and turn off the radio or stop his ears until reasonably certain that the danger is past" ("Mothers Protest 'Bogyman'"). Coming hot on the heels of the much-publicized Payne Fund studies (1929-32),<sup>4</sup> which examined the effect of motion pictures on children, the Scarsdale protest triggered what cultural historian James Gilbert would later term a "cycle of outrage" (Gilbert).<sup>5</sup> Through the 1930s, women's organizations, educators, parent groups and child experts seized on the alleged onslaught of radio 'horror' to articulate and defend their own perspectives on childhood, childrearing, and the role the broadcast medium should play in family life.<sup>6</sup>

The Scarsdale crusade targeted a particularly influential and seductive new medium, but it was also part of a more prolonged struggle by

middle-class parents against the encroachment of sensation-oriented popular culture into the home. From the dime novels of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to today's video games, social media and other consumption technologies, children's fascination with popular media has repeatedly prompted indignant calls for regulation (Bruce "Children's Media Consumption" 27-29). The invocation of the concept of horror to describe the threat posed by the broadcast medium epitomizes the emotive nature of the struggle over children's radio. The Scarsdale parents mainly objected to programs that shared little in common with grisly night-time series like *The Hermit's Cave* (1930-44) or *The Witch's Tale* (1931-38) ("Children's Radio Programs Are Surveyed by P.T.A. Group").<sup>7</sup> Instead, they vented their fury at juvenile adventure serials like *Little Orphan Annie* (1930-42), a recent innovation modeled on, and often adapted from newspaper comic strips.<sup>8</sup> Broadcast daily in 15-minute installments during the afternoon 'children's hour', these serials represented a horrific proposition for some parents because of their intense emotional impact on young listeners and their noxious fusion of thrills and commercialism (see, for example, Eisenberg 6, and Mann).<sup>9</sup> Parents and educators accused these programs of a multitude of sins against middle-class family values: of degrading standards of language and conduct; of discouraging reading; of promoting fantasies of social levelling; of eroding parental authority; and of causing children to lose their innocence through addiction to morbid sensations and the seductions of the marketplace.<sup>10</sup>

Attacks on children's programming receded later in the decade after the Federal Communications Commission persuaded the major networks to adopt self-regulatory codes of conduct that limited violence, anti-social

impulses and excessive stimulation in children's radio fare.<sup>11</sup> The end of the war, however, saw a considerable resurgence of protest against sensational programs and their purported impact on young listeners, which played out across numerous radio forums, newspaper articles, educational conferences and public talks (see, for example, Samuels). While demonstrating significant continuities with the 1930s campaign, this new controversy was also shaped by the distinctive cultural and broadcasting ecologies of the postwar era.

By this time radio was an established facet of everyday life, and had secured new legitimacy during the war as a vehicle for information, entertainment, and the consolidation of national identity. Critics were nonetheless quick to chastise broadcasters for failing to deliver on their public service obligations – hence the frequent complaints through the 1940s about the networks' increasing reliance on crime, mystery and horror programs. In a March 1942 *New York Times* article, for example, John K. Hutchens railed against such “ethereal abattoirs” as *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* and *The Shadow* (1937-54) for preferring “straight carnage to mere mystery” (“The Shockers” X12).<sup>12</sup> A 1943 feature article in *Billboard* similarly noted the prominence of the “tear-your-throat-out, split-your-noggin-with-a-cleaver school” of radio horror, though it predicted (incorrectly) that wartime exposure to real-life violence would diminish the audience's appetite for such audio sensations (“Gory Road with Detour Sign”). A perceived escalation in the volume and intensity of such programs after the war prompted further complaints.<sup>13</sup> Young listeners may not have been the target audience for these nighttime crime and horror series, but there was sufficient evidence that

they were both captivated by and had ready access to them, irrespective of parental approval.<sup>14</sup>

It was not the programs in themselves that reignited the controversy over children and radio, however, so much as the new significance they attained within the urgent and extensive “family-centered culture” of the postwar years (May xxi). Elaine Tyler May posits that the uncertainties of the Cold War and the atomic age enhanced both the sentimental currency of children and the symbolic role they could play in compensating for cultural anxieties:

A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation.

Children would also be a connection to the future and a means of replenishing a world depleted by war deaths... In secure postwar homes with plenty of children, American women and men might be able to ward off their nightmares and live out their dreams. The family seemed to be the one place where people could control their destinies and perhaps even shape the future. (May 17-18)

With their worrisome appeal to the young, radio’s sensational programs potentially jeopardized this sentimental construction of children, locating them as a conduit for the world of nightmare rather than as a safeguard against it. Indicative of such outrage was the crusade launched in February 1947 by “60-year-old Washington matron” Mrs. George F. Hanowell, who established the National Council for Youth Entertainment to pressure



broadcasters into stemming the deluge of mystery and thriller series (“Fight Horror Shows”; Stein “Child Psychologists”). Hanowell told *Time* magazine that her mission was inspired by seeing the young children of a friend huddled around the radio receiver as *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* “was blasting away. There was a fusillade of shots, gurgling sounds of a woman dying, then sirens screaming and shouts of ‘Look out... cops!’” (“Radio: The Children’s Hour”). Hanowell lobbied radio stations and sponsors, generating support in 44 states and securing 350,000 signatures on her petition as well as the support of churches, women’s clubs, PTA groups and civic organizations (“Radio: The Children’s Hour”; Lindsay; “‘Crime and Horror’ Broadcasts Attacked”). Aware of the damage that could result from her protest, and mindful of a forthcoming congressional bill calling for an investigation of radio crime shows, the networks sought to appease Hanowell – while simultaneously enlisting child psychologists to refute her accusations (“Radio: The Children’s Hour”).

The postwar firestorm over children and sensational programs ultimately proved to be short-lived, as comic books, television and rock’n’roll soon supplanted radio as the main targets of moral reform (see, for example, West 41-53; Starker 130-41). But while it lasted the campaign achieved an intensity that matched the alarmist rhetoric of the 1930s, with some critics blaming broadcasters for encouraging or even causing juvenile delinquency.<sup>15</sup> It was amid this renewed cycle of outrage that the Mutual network took the bold step of airing its children’s horror program. Delivering the sensations young listeners relished in audio horror while undermining their traditional foundations of fear, ignorance and superstition, *House of Mystery* exemplified the cathartic and therapeutic claims that advocates of children’s culture often

proposed in defense of comic books, radio dramas and other stimulating media productions.

Josette Frank's work as a campaigner for the influential parent-education group the Child Study Association of America (CSA) directly inspired Olga Druce's production and promotion of *House of Mystery*. For several years, Frank had espoused the value of often maligned forms of children's culture, while her hands-on contribution to comic book and radio enterprises also offered a model for progressive involvement in the culture industries. *House of Mystery* itself built on the productive collaboration between Frank, Druce and Robert Maxwell on the juvenile serial *The Adventures of Superman* (1940-51).<sup>16</sup> In the face of intemperate attacks on children's radio, both programs showed that it was possible to combine thrilling adventure scenarios with socially enlightened content. As I will suggest, Frank and Druce were passionate and principled advocates of children's programming and of the rights of the young listener. They shared a fervent belief in the value of radio drama as a forum for confronting ignorance and prejudice, including the blinkered attitudes that often greeted children's radio itself.

### **Josette Frank and Progressive Children's Culture**

A tireless figure in the debate about children's media consumption in the USA, Josette Frank spent several decades as the CSA's director of children's books and mass media ("Josette Frank, 96 Dies"). Like the association's founder and director, Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, Frank seized as many opportunities as she could to disseminate its progressive educational philosophy. She

contributed frequently to such popular magazines as *Parents*, *Better Homes and Gardens* and the *Saturday Review of Literature* as well as writing several books and pamphlets (Bruce “Creating Consumers and Protecting Children” 166).<sup>17</sup> In public statements on literature, radio, films, comics and television, Frank challenged overprotective parents who sought to deprive their offspring of excitement, arguing that it was crucial to engage children with material that provided an outlet for unsettling emotions (see, for example, “Children Demand Fairy Tale Wolf Be Big and Bad”, “Let Children Choose”).

Frank’s critique of parental privilege sparked controversy, as did her defense of ‘low’ cultural forms. Her highly-regarded 1937 book *What Books for Children?* proposed that comic strips could fulfil “a deep psychic need of children” (qtd. Hajdu 60), while several articles claimed similar merit for radio programs (“Those Children’s Radio Programs”, “Radio and Our Children”). Such favorable responses from a respected authority on children’s education encouraged media producers to solicit her involvement in their enterprises. In 1941 growing criticism of the sensationalism of comic books prompted Detective Comics, Inc. (aka. DC) to enlist Frank for the comic group’s Editorial Advisory Board, along with other authorities such as education professor W.W.D. Sones and psychologists Robert Thorndike and Laurretta Bender (Tilley 91-2).<sup>18</sup> In collaboration with DC editors and publicity staff, the Board devised a set of standards for comic books that was distributed to the company’s editors, writers and artists (Quattro, “Josette Frank... Part 1”).<sup>19</sup> From 1941 to 1946 Frank participated more directly in DC publications via regular book reviews in such comics as *Batman*, *Detective Comics*, *More Fun*

*Comics*, *Star Spangled Comics* and *Superman*, through which she aimed to encourage literacy among young readers (Tilley 91).

Frank's progressive views on children's culture also led producer Robert Maxwell to request her opinion of his radio version of *The Adventures of Superman*. He asked her to vet the first two scripts prior to the serial's debut broadcast in early 1940, and subsequently offered her a more formal editorial advisory role on both the *Superman* program and *Hop Harrigan* (1942-48) – a further comic book adaptation (from DC sister company All-American Publications) (Quattro, "Josette Frank... Part 1"). For producers of comic books and radio programs, testimonials from child education experts provided a valuable antidote to negative criticism. Like Gruenberg – who was briefly a consultant for Fawcett Comics (Tilley 96) – Frank believed the best way to effect change in child-oriented commercial media was to collaborate with producers, networks and publishers (Bruce "Creating Consumers and Protecting Children" 171).<sup>20</sup> But while she opposed knee-jerk denunciations of comic books and radio thrillers, Frank was no mere apologist for the media industries. Her reviews for *Child Study* condemned programs that relied on excessive sensation or on racial, ethnic and religious stereotypes (ibid.178), and she also protested the skimpy clothing worn by DC's Wonder Woman and the comic's sadistic women-in-chains scenarios (Lepore 243).

Frank played a key role in shaping Superman's socially responsible moral code, in print and on the airwaves (Quattro, "Josette Frank... Part 3"). In a September 1944 letter to Robert Maxwell she suggested they could revise the *Superman* program to add "something new and fine and important... to the late afternoon children's radio hour. And the more I think

about it the more excited I am about what might be done. It seems that the time is ripe for just such an event in juvenile radio”.<sup>21</sup> Maxwell welcomed her recommendation, and from 1946 the man of steel would battle the evils of religious and racial intolerance, political corruption, and domestic fascism. Combining showmanship and public service values, the revamped *Superman* program won over audiences as well as many critics who were ordinarily hostile to juvenile serials. The *New York Times*’ esteemed broadcasting critic Jack Gould praised the first ‘New Superman’ story arc, “The Hate Mongers’ Organization”, for the way it integrated a critique of religious prejudice within its adventure narrative (“On the New Superman”).<sup>22</sup> With subsequent storylines tackling the problems posed by juvenile gangs, political venality, and the Ku Klux Klan, the program tapped into the social reformist ebullience of the immediate postwar era. But not everyone welcomed the injection of social issues. Kellogg, the program’s sponsor, was nervous about funding a critique of racial intolerance, while the Mutual network feared alienating its Southern affiliates. Some women’s organizations and child experts also believed such ‘controversial’ storylines were inappropriate for children’s programming (Bruce “Creating Consumers and Protecting Children” 172-4).

The ‘New Superman’ serials testified to Frank’s conviction that it was possible for youth programs to be both exciting and socially responsible. A January 1942 article for the entertainment trade magazine *Variety* offered a detailed account of her views on children’s radio, and it prefigures Olga Druce’s later pronouncements on the topic. In “Throwing Out the Baby Along with the Bath” Frank argues that the previous decade’s frenzied criticism of

programming for young listeners has made radio stations, networks, sponsors and advertising agencies wary of catering to their interests:

We have fewer bad children's programs but we have also fewer children's programs of any kind. Some very good programs suffered in the general demise, too... The net result is that children who crave entertainment in the late afternoon hours now have to choose between fairly limited and stereotyped juvenile fare and adult heart-throb drama or news programs (Frank "Throwing Out the Baby" 110).

Besides curtailing the range of programming available, Frank contends, the earlier campaign against children's radio also neglected what they most related to in audio drama. She challenges the common parental objection to programs that "feed the children too much noise and excitement, too much unreal adventure, not enough educational content and too little good English diction" (ibid.). While acknowledging that children "need to be protected from things too hard to take", she insists that "normal children can take – wholesomely and profitably – a great deal more than some adults would allow them, or can take themselves" (ibid. 140). With many psychologists and psychiatrists affirming children's need for excitement and adventure, she proposes that "[f]antasy, swift motion, even violence are a part of the elemental drama for children as for adults" (ibid. 110). Like other defenders of children's culture, Frank argued for the cathartic value of certain kinds of thrilling material in enabling children to come to terms with impulses and emotions that might otherwise prove damaging. In a 1946 radio forum on

the topic of children's programming, for example, she proposed that "vicarious adventure, escape, excitement, even blood and thunder are necessary and important to most children as outlets for their own emotions, particularly their feelings of aggression" ("Radio's Influence on Children"). She cautioned, too, that by denying such excitement to children in programs made for them, they may seek it in adult-oriented fare (Frank "Throwing Out the Baby", 110).

Insisting that censorship and regulatory codes could not resolve the shortcomings of children's radio, Frank argued instead for a socially responsible and child-centered approach to programming (ibid.). On 29 September 1944, she wrote to Robert Maxwell suggesting that the time was ripe for a creative rethinking of youth broadcasting provision:

There is a great stirring in our educational and cultural world, and children are a part of it. I believe that some of our "best minds" are turned toward children these days and I believe could be brought to focus right now on the really rewarding business of shaping a new kind of radio entertainment for children (Quattro, "Josette Frank... Part 3").

The challenge, as she saw it, was to devise programs that satisfied the commercial imperatives of network radio while simultaneously fulfilling the demands of children, in a manner that was also acceptable to parents and educators. Achieving this goal would require "knowledge of children, knowledge of radio, creative thinking and a point of view" (Frank "Throwing Out the Baby", 110). Olga Druce was certainly well qualified for such a mission.

## Let the Kids Decide

Druce brought a distinctive and diversified skillset to children's radio programming.<sup>23</sup> For a start, she was an experienced drama practitioner. After graduating from Smith College in the early 1930s, she studied at Max Reinhardt's celebrated acting school in Berlin before delivering well-received performances in such Broadway plays as Elmer Rice's political melodrama *Judgment Day* (1934), the comedy drama *Moon over Mulberry Street* (1935-6), Reinhardt's production of *The Eternal Road* (1937), and William Saroyan's *Time of Your Life* (1939).<sup>24</sup> Druce's ambitions extended beyond the professional theatre, however, as she grew increasingly interested in the issues affecting the young. During the war, she participated in several community outreach ventures that used drama as a vehicle for promoting creativity and social inclusiveness among disadvantaged youth.<sup>25</sup> To enhance her awareness of the problems facing young people, she also studied social work and child psychology at the Washington School of Psychiatry and New York's New School for Social Research (Ovington; "Television's Effect on Children").

By the early 1940s, Druce later observed, she had grown "vitally interested... in the problem of creating entertainment that would be intriguing and beneficial to children", believing that "drama was the most powerful, forceful education medium" ("The TV Sponsor as Star-Maker"). Radio allowed her to put such ideas into practice, with *House of Mystery* drawing directly on the skills she had developed in theatre, social work, and education. Druce began her broadcasting career as a writer on several factual and fictional



programs, and worked as a psychological consultant on the CBS daytime serial *This Changing World* (1944) (“Beautiful and Brainy”). But her most significant early contribution to the medium was *The Adventures of Superman*. Druce claimed the *Superman* team hired her, in late 1941 or early 1942, in the belief that her educational experience could help them “clean it up because it was too racist, too violent, and parents were objecting” (Kisseloff 455).<sup>26</sup> Reliable information about her tenure on the program, and the extent and nature of her input, is elusive but Druce undoubtedly encountered Josette Frank during this period. Whether they collaborated directly or not, the similarity between their perspectives on children’s radio suggests that Druce was at the very least strongly influenced by Frank in determining the progressive direction the serial took after the war.

Frank’s influence is also apparent in the numerous talks and articles in which Druce confronted the charges leveled at youth programming. Her 1947 *Variety* think piece “Kid Shows: Or Everybody Wants to Get in the Axe” describes such attacks as “intense, subjective, emotionalized and sustained”. Claims that radio programs harm children emotionally, she argues, tend to rely not on clinical evidence but on rhetoric, anecdote and selective examples of inept production (Druce “Kid Shows”). Her 1948 *Variety* article “Let the Kids Decide” takes an even stronger line, by characterizing the American child as “an oppressed minority among us that seldom gets the kind of attention it deserves”. Critics speak about the young listener repeatedly, she observes, but rarely in a considered and thoughtful manner that acknowledges “his [sic] right to listen to the kind of radio entertainment he considers satisfying”. Echoing Frank, Druce contends that parents, educators, and other authorities

too often seek to replace the programs children like with material that suits adult ideals of childhood. Besides failing to understand what children enjoy in the juvenile thrillers, she asserts, such adults also deny young listeners the kind of recreational downtime they themselves take for granted (ibid.).

*House of Mystery* allowed Druce to realize her reformist ambitions for children's radio, beating Superman to the punch by several months when it came to merging entertainment and educational values. Working within a commercial arena, and within a medium parents scrutinized closely, Druce and her collaborators came up a program that delivered the stimulation children desired from lurid genre fare while countering both morbid sensations and the predictable condemnation of youth programming.

## **Destroy all Foundations of Fear**

One of several Mutual programs developed by Robert Maxwell Associates, *House of Mystery* first aired in January 1945 as a 15-minute daily serial broadcast five times a week at 5.30pm, initially on a sustaining (i.e. unsponsored) basis. By September 1945 the program had attracted a major commercial sponsor, with General Foods bankrolling it to plug the delights of Post-Toasties and Raisin Bran, as well as the services of leading New York advertising agency Benton & Bowles ("General Foods Buys MBS Mystery Seg"). One of the most innovative and successful advertisers in network radio, Benton & Bowles assigned Olga Druce to write for *House of Mystery*, and it was not long before she was directing and producing it as well.<sup>27</sup> [INSERT FIGURE 1a, 1b, 1c] Sponsorship brought with it a change in format, with the program relaunched as a 30-minute episodic series featuring self-contained

# beautiful AND BRAINY



Olga Druce is living proof that the arrogant male who talks about women who are "beautiful but dumb" is merely conversing through his over-size hat.



Olga confers with writer Hugh Campbell-Duncan who authored the week's script... but first had to check the mystery story theme with her via the telephone.



Olga and cast prepare for the first full reading around the table in studio. She briefs actress Ann Burr, as the other members of the cast also listen.

Seated on either side of her are actress Cecil Roy and Walter Shaber. With their backs to the camera are John Griggs, Bernard Lenrow and Peter Cappell.

Olga Druce, who edits, produces and directs *House of Mystery* (Seated on the Dial review in November issue) is not only beautiful and brainy, but a whole flock of superlatives. A graduate of Smith College, Olga also studied at several universities abroad and at the famous Max Reinhardt School of Theatre in Germany before the war. Later, she managed to find time, while pursuing a career in the theatre, for extra studies at the New York School for Social Research and the Washington School of Psychiatry. It was during the war, when Miss Druce was co-chairman of the American Theatre Wing Committee for Youth in War-Time, that she turned to writing. She did a series of health talks for use by prominent physicians, for two years wrote the *Baby Institute* for ABC, and was psychological consultant on *This Changing World*—all before coming to *House of Mystery* first as a writer, now as director-producer.

The foregoing might be expected to conjure up a picture of some prim, bespectacled damsel—the despair of eligible, young bachelors and beauty experts alike. Well, it just isn't so. At present, a more sought-after young woman, by the top-hat, tails and two-tickets-on-the-aisle brigade is hard to find. De-

MORE →



During this reading, she stops the cast from time to time in order to explain some point, or clear up a difficulty in cueing. Then reading is continued.



Ann Burr has a few questions about her role while Cecil Roy, John Griggs and organist Bert Buhrman do some study on script. Peter Cappell scans the news.

spite all the invitations she receives, however, Olga has little time for the social whirl. Most of her week is spent in selecting writers, working with them, checking details in the script, selecting cast, and putting on the week's *House of Mystery* story each Sunday afternoon. As if that isn't enough, she even writes the commercials! And her commercials, just as the program itself, have won her acclaim and awards.

Whatever free time Olga has is spent in listening to other people's work on the air in her constant search for new actors and writers. Incidentally, if you might want to try writing a script for her program, Miss Druce gives these hints: first, drop her a line, briefly outlining the idea or "gimmick." If the idea is good and has not been used on the program before, you will be invited to send in the script. If it can be used, it will be well paid for.

But this was a profile of Olga Druce. The above sneaked in only because Olga herself gets off on these tangents of trying to help others win a measure of success. That's one reason why these cynical fellows, who are so fond of disparaging career women, suddenly find themselves wanting very much to be counted among her friends. The other is obvious—but why not say it? Olga Druce, though brilliant, is also very definitely "whistle bait."

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BEAUTIFUL AND BRAINY continued

the show goes on...



Dress rehearsal done, Olga and engineer Jim Shannon talk it over. "How did it sound to you?" she asks anxiously. "It was fine," replies Jim. Air Time is now only minutes away.



The hands of the clock move swiftly. With the broadcast only seconds away, Olga lights a cigarette to relieve the tension. Out in the studio, the cast and technicians all stand by.



Olga has just signalled the players that they have been a little too fast in their pace. She stands, tense and ready to throw the next cue. Under her skilled hands the plot thickens.



This is the climax! Olga, in the control room, feels the drama as much as if she herself were out there, acting in it. Her intensity succeeds in drawing out a still better performance.

Olga asks photographer Leonard Halpern, "Are you ready to start shooting? You've been carrying that camera around all afternoon." He confesses to have already taken his "shots."



BACK IN HER OFFICE

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Figure 1a, 1b, 1c: Despite its sexist compromises, this contemporary magazine profile suggests Druce's tireless commitment to the production of *House of Mystery*. ("Beautiful and Brainy," *Radio Best* (January 1948): 32-33, 36).

stories, broadcast at midday on Saturdays (“Capt. Midnight’ Goes to MBS”). In October 1946, Mutual relocated *House of Mystery* to Sundays at 4pm, as part of its highly successful block-programming strategy to dominate Sunday afternoons and evenings with a suite of low-cost crime, mystery and adventure programs. It remained in this timeslot until its cancellation in December 1949. The ratings produced by Hooper, Nielsen, Pulse and CAB reveal that throughout its time on the air *House of Mystery* was extremely popular, especially when it preceded thriller favorite *The Shadow*.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond its ratings value, *House of Mystery* also served Mutual as a prestige venture that could offset negative criticism of its children’s programming. With a comparatively small portfolio of commercial sponsors, the network’s reliance on modestly budgeted genre programs like crime series and juvenile serials made it vulnerable to the moral outrage over radio violence. In a 1947 feature article, *Variety*’s music editor Herman Schoenfeld castigated Mutual and fellow low-status network ABC for their youth programming policies. Echoing the incendiary rhetoric of Hanowell and like-minded crusaders, Schoenfeld attacked the daily scheduling of “blood-and-guts crime-shockers” like *The Adventures of Buck Rogers*, *Hop Harrigan*, *The Adventures of Superman*, *Captain Midnight*, *Tom Mix* (all Mutual), *Dick Tracy*, *Sky King* (1946-54), *Terry and the Pirates*, *Jack Armstrong*, *All American Boy*, and *Tennessee Jed* (1945-47) (all ABC). As he put it:

These serials make up a carnival of sluggings, muggings, shootings, murders and torture - a veritable paradise for sadists.

In each quarter-hour episode, the violence mounts from a high

starting plateau to a towering climactic peak where the dialer is left hanging until he's rescued the following day in "another exciting chapter in the adventure of so-and-so at the same time, same station" (31, 42).

Jack Gould similarly accused Mutual and ABC of failing to achieve a "sensible balance in programming" ("Mystery Show Ban"; "Children's Programs"). With the two networks pumping out 5-6 juvenile serials each weekday from 4.30 to 6pm, he suggested that it was "possible for a youngster to be on an emotional radio jag practically the week long" ("Children's Programs"). Gould argued, however, that instead of ignoring the appeal of high adventure and excitement, program makers should combine such attractions with more ambitious content ("Designed for Children").<sup>29</sup> With its therapeutic spin on genre themes, *House of Mystery* clearly fitted the bill, providing Mutual with a children's program that attracted high ratings, commercial sponsorship, and critical plaudits. At its 1946 conference, Ohio State University's Institute for Education by Radio (IER) awarded *House of Mystery* first prize in the Children's Out of School Listening category, commending the production for achieving "the objectives essential in a program for children... it entertains... it is good radio drama... the suspense is resolved within the program... it proves that knowledge expels the most frightening superstitions" (qtd. in Stein "Child Psychologists" S5).

By transforming *House of Mystery* from a daily 15-minute serial with weeklong story arcs into a weekly 30-minute series with distinct stories, Druce circumvented a common objection to the juvenile serial. Herman Schoenfeld

identified seriality as the biggest challenge to child experts' claims about the benefits of the juvenile thriller, as the "serialized structure . . . nullifies completely its cathartic value, producing instead a permanently inflamed and purposely unappeased appetite for violence" (42). Psychologist William F. Soskin similarly charged that, the serial form of juvenile thriller overstimulates the young listener "to an unacceptable degree". With each episode ending on "a high note of suspense..." he proposed, "the cumulative effect of unrelieved tension is quite appreciable" – especially when the serials were scheduled together in concentrated blocks ("Radio's Influence on Children"). By contrast, Josette Frank argued, *House of Mystery* "skillfully safeguards . . . against a 'hangover' of overstimulation and tension" (qtd. in Stein "Child Psychologists" S8).<sup>30</sup> This change in format anticipated a general move away from revolving plot serials in postwar children's programming. Facing continued protests from groups such as the national Parent-Teacher Association, the networks reorganized children's hour in the late 1940s to replace daily serials with self-contained 30-minute episodes (Barfield 121). By the end of the decade the serials Schoenfeld complained about had all left the airwaves: *Buck Rogers* and *Tennessee Jed* finished their runs in 1947, and *Hop Harrigan*, *Terry and the Pirates* and *Dick Tracy* in 1948. *The Adventures of Superman*, *Captain Midnight* and *Tom Mix Ralston Sharp Shooters* persisted for a few more years, but from 1949 they had all shifted to the series format (Stedman 208; Bratten).

*House of Mystery's* most innovative feature, however, was its renegotiation of the scenarios and techniques of mystery, crime and horror radio. In 1947 *Radio Best* described it as "one 'thriller' that tells a fascinating

story without trying to scare the bejeepers out of the little things . . . while doing a neat job of debunking incidents other story-tellers might handle as ‘supernatural’”. The article praised the series as trailblazing “top-drawer entertainment” that resists the temptation either to “talk down” to its young listeners or to avoid suspense (JSG 18-19). While evoking the atmospheric staples of horror series like *The Witch’s Tale* or *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* – involving hauntings, black magic, or monsters – *House of Mystery* disqualifies the supernatural as an explanatory framework. In each episode, the recurring character-narrator Roger Elliot, the “Man of Mystery” (mostly played by John Griggs) investigates seemingly uncanny happenings, and ultimately exposes them as the product of either human agency or nature. Chills and thrills are crucial to the dramatic impact of the stories, but Eliot explains them through reason rather than superstition.

As Maxwell outlined in his February 1945 letter, *House of Mystery* set out to counter the lure of the supernatural from the outset (Quattro, “Josette Frank... Part 3”). Druce greatly developed this thematic rationale when she took over the program, seizing every opportunity to promote its instructional agenda. In her article “Let the Kids Decide”, for example, she argued that: “The show I do is a ghost story with a logical explanation, proving that belief in ghosts and superstitions is based on irrational fear – and ignorance – and that prejudices also grow in the same soil”. In a 1949 *Variety* article Druce insisted that *House of Mystery* directly challenges the melodramatic clichés of crime and mystery programs via a process of “emotional education”. The series aims, she proposes, to show that many fears – “of the dark, of other countries or the unknown” - are nursed by our own guilt and hostility, which must be

faced to be overcome (qtd. In “Whodunits Are Psycho Aids” 25, 35).

Paraphrasing Druce, *Variety* suggested that the program resists “the run-of-the-dial whodunit’s sadistic criminals with their violence, barking gats and tough talk. On *House* the villain is generally the ghost-creating element – ignorance and fear” (ibid. 35). Or, as a 1949 profile of Druce added, “When a real live badman is needed, she always explains what made the man do wrong, and how he could be helped” (“Mystery Shows Can Be Worthy”).

*House of Mystery*’s most extensive mission statement appears in a lengthy 1946 *Radio Mirror* article, entitled “Afraid-”, which carries the by-line of the fictional ‘Roger Elliot’. This is so close to Druce’s views on the series that she more than likely wrote it. In a key paragraph, ‘Elliot’ elucidates the program’s therapeutic rationale as follows:

Modern educators do feel that some of the stories on which most of us were brought up can have a harmful effect on young imaginations. But . . . we don’t tell stories about witches and ghosts and mysterious supernatural beings on the *House of Mystery*. We tell stories in which people *imagine* horrible, unnatural, superstitious things and then we show with facts and knowledge and understanding how such things never existed at all, except by virtue of ignorance. We prove, over and over again, that there are really no mysterious, supernatural beings or occurrences. There are only unknown factors, which, once they are known and understood, destroy all the foundations of fear.



That's what we're trying to do in our small way – destroy fear.

(Elliot 19)

With only five episodes currently available from *House of Mystery's* five-year run, it is difficult to generalize about the program's content. Two of the surviving episodes are 15-minute installments from the early five-part serials, before Druce's involvement – the second part of "The Monster in the Lake" (broadcast 8 May 1945), and the third part of "The Haunters and the Haunted" (13 June 1945). The other three are 30-minute episodes from the Druce era: "The Ghost Who Forgot Halloween" (27 October 1945), "The Mystery of the Bat Boy" (17 November 1945), and "A Gift from the Dead" (3 August 1947). Apart from "Bat Boy", these programs all feature prologue and epilogue sequences in which Roger Elliot interacts playfully with the children who gather round him to hear a spooky story. During this genial storytelling context, a return to the framework of the traditional children's hour, the Mystery Man delivers homilies about healthy living as well as promoting the benefits of Post-Toasties.<sup>31</sup> These framing sequences provide a buffer against the more sinister content of the drama.

Roger Elliot stresses that the uncanny events of each story will have a logical explanation, but the dramatizations nonetheless make effective use of atmospheric radio horror techniques, such as organ stings, creepy sound effects, and evocative narration. They also draw on familiar standbys of horror narrative like the mysterious gothic mansion (in "A Gift from the Dead"), ghosts ("The Haunters and the Haunted", "The Ghost Who Forgot Halloween"), and monsters ("The Monster in the Lake", "Bat Boy"). The

program's realization of horror was so successful that it proved popular with adults as well as well as young listeners. Reviewing the first 30-minute episode, for example, *Variety* commented that "The show is alleged to be a moppet stanza, but differed almost not at all in content, quality and pace from a half-hour adult mystery. Only noticeable difference was at the climax where villains don't go to the gallows but rather are explained as mentally sick and are confined to mental institution" ("House of Mystery").

Existing episodes reveal the use of diverse strategies to contain, recontextualize, or distantiate the horror. "The Ghost Who Forgot Halloween", for example, undercuts the ominous associations of Halloween via an expressly whimsical and comic tale. Wilbur, a young ghost, is failing his lessons in moaning and groaning at ghost school because he keeps falling asleep in class. The otherworldly realm of ghosts thus reflects on the more familiar terrain of childhood, with the supernatural framework helping to construct a parable about appropriate behavior at school. The program renders the apparatus of horror as harmless make-believe that kids can laugh at rather than be scared by – as when, to punish Wilbur, his teacher, Miss Spook, takes away his sheet and forces him to walk around in his bones. Roger Elliot is also on hand to deliver an informative lecture that explains seemingly irrational occurrences and rituals: in this case, he offers a factual account of the genesis and history of Halloween.

Other episodes conclude with Elliot demystifying the seemingly uncanny events dramatized in the story. In "A Gift from the Dead", for example, the widow Jane Kolvrak believes her domineering husband is returning from the grave to torment her. On their fifth wedding anniversary

Basil gave her a musical casket stuffed with precious jewels, telling her that by accepting the gift she will be “bound forever to the Kolvraks”. Although the casket disappeared after his death, jewels from it keep mysteriously turning up a year later, accompanied by chiming music. The episode builds a strong gothic atmosphere, with events and narration reminiscent of an Edgar Allan Poe story. After investigating, however, Roger Elliot discovers that the mystery derives not from supernatural forces but from animal behavior and human criminality. The reappearance of the jewels, he explains, is due to “the work of a notorious kleptomaniac – the pack-rat”, which has been digging the gems from the casket after a miscreant chauffeur concealed it in the wainscoting. The chauffeur had hoped to return to the house to steal the jewels, but died in the same car crash as Basil Kolvrak. As in other *House of Mystery* stories, Roger Elliot dispels the uncanny shadows by subjecting them to the light of reason – even if, as in this case, the ultimate explanation is not especially convincing!

“The Mystery of the Bat Boy” suggests that *House of Mystery* offered other educative possibilities beyond the championing of reason. Stopping at a backwoods general store on a drive through North Carolina, Roger Elliot hears that the area is plagued by a monstrous ‘bat boy’ – a child born with horns, who has allegedly cursed the local cattle and burned down a barn. Like “A Gift from the Dead”, the episode builds a substantial atmosphere of horror as Roger goes in search of the strange being. At a cabin in the woods he encounters a highly-strung young woman, Carrie Heflin, who informs him that the so-called bat boy is her younger brother, Johnny, who was born with a physical abnormality. Carrie rescued her brother and raised him in secret,

after superstitious locals had taken the baby into the woods and left him to die. Kept away from the sunlight, Johnny has grown up “pale and grey”, a creature of the night with “bat’s eyes” who, Carrie believes, “has a curse on him”.

The arrival of an armed mob led by storekeeper Pappy Brenner interrupts their discussion. Wielding his automatic pistol, Roger forces the intruders to drop their guns, telling Brenner he wishes to “clear up what I knew to be a mystery, based on ignorance and superstition. Carrie Heflin’s little brother is as human as any of you are, maybe more so”. When Brenner replies that Johnny does not look human, Roger lays the blame squarely at the hands of the ignorant locals:

“you forced him to live like an animal, in a dark room. That made him sick, a real sickness that was born out of fear.... Look at him, Mr. Brenner. Does he have horns growing out of his head like you said he did? Does he have fur like a bat? True, his skin is grey and unhealthy, but that’s because you – *all* of you – who tried to murder him as an infant, kept him from ever seeing the sun. I’ve been all over the world, and I’ve seen some horrible things that human beings in blind ignorance do to one another. But I’ve never seen anything like this”.

Beyond chastising the mob for their unreasoning intolerance, Elliot demonstrates that Brenner himself killed the cattle and torched the barn, exploiting fear of the bat boy to sell more feed and livestock to the farmers. As

well as indicting ignorance, superstitious, and greed, then, this episode of *House of Mystery* makes a broader plea for the toleration of difference. Rather than using the figure of the monster as a generic source of horror, the drama identifies Johnny Heflin's 'monstrousness' as deriving not from his psychological and physical afflictions but as a social construct that is projected onto him by others. "The Mystery of the Bat Boy" illustrates *House of Mystery's* renegotiation of the conventional procedures of both horror radio and children's radio, demonstrating that in the right hands kiddies' programs could be both thrilling and enlightening.

Like the revamped *Adventures of Superman*, *House of Mystery* not only proved a substantial and long-lasting ratings success but also enjoyed extensive acclaim from parental and educational groups. Besides winning the IER award, for example, Rose Kobert of the United Parents' Association commended the program as a rare example of good practice in youth programming ("Child Programs Studied"). In 1949 the government of Haiti also acclaimed Olga Druce for several episodes that exploded the voodoo rites and superstitious beliefs prevalent in the island republic ("Mystic Haiti Yarns"; "Haiti Honors"; "Radio Programs and Personalities"; Gerhard). Not everyone was so welcoming, however. While many critics praised it for undermining the sensationalism of other mystery shows, Mrs. Hanowell's National Council for Youth Entertainment saw no difference between *House of Mystery* and other "spine-chilling, nerve-wracking offenders" such as *The Shadow*, *The Green Hornet* (1936-52), *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* and *Crime*

*Doctor* (1940-47) (Stein “Child Psychologists” S8). This kind of myopic response demonstrates the emotive and rhetorical circularity that, as both Frank and Druce argued, too often impeded discussions of radio programming for children. Within this highly contested climate, even avowedly progressive programs like *Superman* and *House of Mystery* could not escape censure from less enlightened critical voices if they dared to work *with* rather than distancing themselves *from* the popular generic frameworks to which young listeners clearly responded.

Mutual terminated *House of Mystery* when General Foods decided to transfer its sponsorship to the juvenile Western series *Hopalong Cassidy* (1948-52). This was a controversial decision, as the program was still achieving high ratings at the time – in late November 1949 it had a Hooper rating of 6.9, far outstripping competitors on other networks in the same timeslot (“GF’s ‘Mystery’”; “Whodunits Are Psycho Aids”). After its surprise cancellation, Druce tried to find a new home for *House of Mystery*: in 1950 NBC seriously considered adopting it for their Saturday morning schedule, and Druce was also planning a television version (“NBC on Prowl”; “From the Production Centers” (18 January 1950); “From the Production Centers” (22 February 1950)). Neither project came to fruition, but in December 1951 Druce’s affiliation with Benton & Bowles allowed her to take over production of the children’s space adventure *Captain Video* (1949-55) on the DuMont television network. During her two-year tenure on the program, Druce gave it the kind of conceptual makeover she had delivered to *House of Mystery* (Weinstein 72-74). As Deborah Larson puts it, she transformed *Captain Video* “from a campy science fiction program into a social and moral educational tool

for Cold War audiences, making it a viable production that actually made money” (Larson 46-47). Through her friendship with Arthur C. Clarke, Druce persuaded such noted science fiction writers as Jack Vance and Damon Knight to write for the series, investing it with greater psychological depth, scientific credibility, and moral instruction (Weinstein 81-85). A 1951 manifesto in *Radio-Television Daily* made it clear that the crusading educative spirit that had animated *House of Mystery* was alive and well in outer space, with Druce vowing that the stories in *Captain Video* would help the young viewer “take his place as a responsible citizen of his community, his country, and the world” (qtd. in Weinstein, 84).

#### ILLUSTRATION CAPTION:

*Figure 1a, 1b, 1c:* Despite its sexist compromises, this article from a contemporary magazine profile indicates Druce’s tireless commitment to the production of *House of Mystery*. (“Beautiful and Brainy”, *Radio Best* (January 1948): 32-33, 36).

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Described by *Variety* as a “juve package specialist”, Maxwell, a former pulp writer, ran a production company with his wife Jessica (“General Foods Shutters”), which was also responsible for *Hop Harrigan*, *Creeps by Night* (1944) and *Criminal Casebook* (1948).

<sup>2</sup> See also “Mystery House Director Defends Radio Thrillers”.

<sup>3</sup> See also “Broadcasters Act to Curb ‘Bogyman’” and “Mothers Fighting the Radio Bogies”.

<sup>4</sup> On the Payne Fund studies, see Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert deploys the concept in relation to the US moral panic over juvenile delinquency in the 1950s.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of the anti-radio campaign see, for example, West 33-36, 38; Spring 121; Dennis 33-50; and Bruce “Creating Consumers and Protecting Children” 79-92. See Gruenberg 123-34 for a more positive contemporary assessment of children’s relationship to broadcasting.

<sup>7</sup> See Hand for a detailed account of radio horror programs.

<sup>8</sup> Based on Harold Gray’s popular *Chicago Tribune* strip, *Little Orphan Annie* was the first of the new style daily adventure/thriller serials that would come to dominate network children’s programming for almost two decades. Other examples included *Skippy* (1931-3), *Buck Rogers in the 25<sup>th</sup> Century* (1932-47), *Bobby Benson’s Adventures* (1932-36), *Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters* (1933-51), *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy* (1933-51), *Dick Tracy* (1934-48), *Popeye the Sailor* (1935-38), *Flash Gordon* (1935-36), *Terry and the Pirates* (1937-48), and *Captain Midnight* (1939-49).

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<sup>9</sup> Most serials were sponsored by manufacturers of breakfast cereals or other child-friendly consumable, including Kelloggs, General Mills and Ovaltine. Pitches for the sponsor's product, or related announcements, constituted one third to a half of each 15-minute episode.

<sup>10</sup> Amanda Bruce suggests that the juvenile thrillers may have sparked disapproval because they allowed their youthful protagonists to enjoy adventures in the adult world away from the supervision of parents, who were often absent or dead in the stories ("Creating Consumers and Protecting Children 49-50).

<sup>11</sup> CBS adopted such a code in 1935 and NBC in 1939 ("CBS New Policies"; "New NBC Program Policies" 559-60; Miller 685-87). Industry trade body the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) established a further code of ethics in July 1939, which expressly banned from children's programs "sequences involving horror or torture or use of the supernatural or superstition or any other material which might reasonably be regarded as likely to over-stimulate the child-listener, or be prejudicial to sound character development" ("The New Code for the Broadcasting Industry").

<sup>12</sup> Two years later Hutchens similarly condemned the networks' dependence on cheaply produced crime programs that reveled in the graphic depiction of murderous acts ("Crime Pays – On the Radio").

<sup>13</sup> In 1946 Ken Crossen estimated that US radio carried four to five mystery and detective shows a day, every one reaching approximately ten million listeners (304). In August the following year, Jack Gould reported, seven of the top ten most highly rated radio programs were "devoted in one form or another to the thrill and to the chill" ("The News of Radio"). Media historian J.

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Fred Macdonald claims that by 1949 “radio was broadcasting 50 murders a week - 2,400 killings a year - the majority of such deaths occurring in detective programs” (Macdonald 95).

<sup>14</sup> Various surveys confirmed that youngsters were especially keen on stories with mystery, action and suspense – precisely those elements most condemned by parents and educators. See, for example: Thorndike; Mackenzie; “94 Per Cent of Moppets”; “Mysteries: Children Listen”; “Young Fans Still Like Their Whodunits”; “Teen-agers Like Mysteries”.

<sup>15</sup> Few critics directly connected radio and juvenile delinquency before World War 2 (but see “Crime Broadcasts Assailed by Panken”; Gibson 294 and “Radio Crime Programs” 223). Lou Frankel noted in a 1947 article for *The Nation* that the postwar era concern with the “causes, effects and possible preventives” of juvenile delinquency revived scrutiny of children and radio, especially the “blood-and-thunder shockers” perceived to constitute the bulk of youth programming (Frankel). In 1946, for example, Rose Kobert of the New York PTA called for an all-out campaign to clean up radio’s crime and mystery programs, which “are definitely contributing to juvenile delinquency” (“N.Y. PTA Goes on Warpath”). Broadcasters responded to such accusations by claiming that radio was being unfairly scapegoated, as parents held responsibility for supervising what their children listened to (Stein, “Child Psychologists Back Radio’s Defense of its Blood Curdlers” S5).

<sup>16</sup> In his February 1945 letter Mr. Duboff, seven months before Olga Druce joined the program, Robert Maxwell noted that *House of Mystery* was “under the editorial guidance of Josette Frank of the Child Study Association of America” as well as children’s psychiatrist Loretta Bender (Quattro, “Josette

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Frank... Part 3"). This is the only mention I have found of Frank's contribution to this program.

<sup>17</sup> Frank's publications include *What Books for Children? Guideposts for Parents* (1937), *Comics, Radios, Movies – and Children* (1949), *Your Child's Reading Today* (1954), *Television: How to Use it Wisely With Children* (1969), *Poems to Read to the Very Young* (1988), and *Snow Towards Evening* (1990). Her dedication to literature for children was recognized in the retitling of the Children's Book Award as the Josette Frank Award in 1998.

<sup>18</sup> The first significant national attack on comic books was a 1940 *Chicago Daily News* editorial by literary critic Sterling North, entitled "A National Disgrace", which criticized the medium on aesthetic and moral grounds (Nyberg 3-6).

<sup>19</sup> I indebted for much of the information about Josette Frank's involvement with DC Comics and the Superman program to Ken Quattro's detailed research into the Child Study Association correspondence held in the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota, which is presented in his five-part online study.

<sup>20</sup> Frank's close relations with producers of children's media later backfired. Through the 1940s and 1950s she repeatedly challenged psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, who demonized comic books as an inherently corruptive force, but his influential 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent* accused Frank and Gruenberg of complicity with the comics book industry (Tilley 221, 233-34). Guided by Wertham, Senator Estes Kefauver's 1954 Senate Special Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency also sought to discredit Frank and the

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CSA by claiming a conflict of interest (Tilley 233-35; Nyberg 75-77). See Beaty and Hajdu for further discussion of the comic books controversy.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Josette Frank to Robert Maxwell, September 29, 1944, reproduced in Quattro, "Josette Frank... Part 3".

<sup>22</sup> See also "New 'Superman' Slant a Test" 10 and Lewis. For a more skeptical contemporary assessment, see Stein "Superman's a Big Flop" S6.

<sup>23</sup> I have pieced together this account of Druce's career from various scattered sources, especially Druce "Noted in the Drama's Mailbag"; "Beautiful and Brainy"; "Around the Studios"; Ovington; and Weinstein 80-84.

<sup>24</sup> Druce would sustain a lengthy theatrical career, with several stage appearances in the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>25</sup> In 1942, for example, Druce established the American Theatre Wing's Committee on Youth in Wartime with fellow performer Helen Brooks. The Committee sent actors, dancers and stage technicians to New York schools and settlement houses, to assist young people in writing and producing plays ("Theater Helps Adolescents"; "Helen Brooks of 'Arsenic'"). For the Theatre Wing Committee, Druce also ran the Washington Heights Youth Centre in Harlem, where theatre practitioners collaborated with African-American youths on similar projects ("Heads Harlem Youth Centre").

<sup>26</sup> *Variety's* review of the first three episodes indeed warned that "the serial's plots and hard-hitting level of violence ... [may] incur a kickback from parent-teachers association or kindred groups" (Odec.).

<sup>27</sup> On Benton & Bowles, see Meyers 186-200.

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example: “Good for Children”; “Benny, Lux Rated Evening Leaders”; “Giveaways, Mysteries Top Pulse”; “National Nielsen-Ratings Top Programs”.

<sup>29</sup> One program to strike such a balance was Mutual’s *Adventure Parade* (1946-49), produced by the Maxwells, which Herman Schoenfeld described as a “thoughtful, intelligent and entertaining adaptation of the classics of literature into serial form” (42; see also “Once Upon a Time –”). Translating revered literary works like *The Three Musketeers*, *Moby Dick*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Great Expectations* into 15-minute daily episodes, narrated by John Griggs, this sustaining program initiated Mutual’s daily parade of juvenile serials. Schoenfeld was skeptical about Mutual’s motives, however, suggesting that *Adventure Parade* served the network “as an inviting threshold over which the child passes into the ensuing 75-minute chamber of horrors” (ibid.). One newspaper article identified Druce as the originator of *Adventure Parade* (“Radio and Children Tonight’s PTA Topic”).

<sup>30</sup> Seriality suited the commercial agenda of advertisers, who sought to encourage repetitive listening habits. Parents and educators, however, complained that immersion in perpetually unresolved narratives had potentially damaging psychological and emotional repercussions. As Mrs. George Ernst of the Scarsdale group put it, “We object to the mystery thriller, usually not because of its individual content, but because it is a serial. The children don’t just hear it and forget it, but they carry the story in their minds from day to day, or week to week” (“Mothers Fighting the Radio Bogies” 32).

<sup>31</sup> Although a breakfast cereal company sponsored it, the program avoided aggressive and disruptive salesmanship by restricting commercial

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announcements to the start and end of each episode. Consequently, *Radio Best* suggested, they “don’t interfere with your enjoyment, being woven into the show with complete good taste” (JSG 19). As the employee of an advertising agency, Druce was aware of the commercial reality of network broadcasting, while recognizing the need to avoid hard-sell tactics. Instead of leaving the commercials to specialist agency copywriters, as was the usual practice, she also insisted on scripting them herself. Like the show itself, the commercials won acclaim and awards. (“Beautiful and Brainy” 36.) For consideration of hard-sell advertising strategies in US radio, see Meyers 19-23.